

MY OWN LIFE

David Hume

1777 Anticipating his death, Hume wrote <My Own Life> in 1776 for inclusion in the next edition of his <Essays and on Several Subjects>. His instructions are given in letter Adam Smith: "You will find among my Papers a very inoffensive, called <My own Life>, which I composed a few days before I Edinburgh, which I thought, as did all my Friends, that my was despaired of. There can be no Objection, that this small should be sent to Messrs Strahan and Cadell and the of my other Works to be prefixed to any future Edition them" (<Letters>, Greig, Vol. 2, p. 318). In March of 1777, 's <Life> and Smith's <Letter from Adam Smith, LL.D. to William, Esq.> (the latter of which describes the last four months Hume's life) were published under the title <The Life of David, Esq. written by himself>. The pamphlet is prefaced with the note by the editor:

M/R\ H/UME\, a few months before his death, wrote the following short account of his own life; and, in a codicil to his will, desired that it might be prefixed to the next edition of his Works. That edition cannot be published for a considerable time. The Editor, in the mean while, in order to serve the purchasers of the former editions; and, at the same time, to gratify the impatience of the public curiosity; has thought proper to publish it separately, without altering even the title or superscription, which was written in Mr. Hume's own hand on the cover of the manuscript.

spite of the editor's claim of not altering Hume's piece, were taken with spelling, punctuation and minor wording. is evident from a comparison with the original manuscript of 's <Life> which is in the Royal Society of Edinburgh (reprinted Greig, Vol. 1, pp. 1-7). A pre-print of the Hume's <Life> and 's <Letter> appeared in <The Scots Magazine>, January 1777, . 39, pp. 1-7. The <Scots Magazine> version is evidently based on text of the published 1777 pamphlet, rather than the manuscript; although it departs slightly in punctuation, it retains the wording found in the 1777 pamphlet. Contrary to Hume's, his <Life> was not included in the subsequent edition of his <Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects>. The reviews of Hume's <Life> reproduced almost the complete text of Hume's autobiography their reviews. The <Critical Review> concludes noting that "The whole of this narrative breathes ingenuousness, and a noble of integrity, not without that solicitude of literary, well as moral fame, which we may suppose to have animated a, so distinguished, from his earliest years, for his ardor in pursuits of philosophy and general learning" (1777, Vol. 43, pp.-227). The <London Review> relates that Hume held at sword's the editor of <The History of the Works of the Learned> for 1740 review of the <Treatise> (see editor's note to the Hume edition of the review of the <Treatise>). The

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reviewer also surprise that Hume fails to mention Beattie's <Essay>, "It were difficult to speak of this work with more contempt, we are well assured, Mr. Hume entertained of it." Other reactions to Hume's <Life> quickly appeared, many of which negative. Although most of the negative reaction was aimed at's <Letter> (see editor's note to the Hume Archives edition of's <Letter>), criticism was also directed at Hume's essay. For, an anonymous author comments in the <Weekly Magazine, or Amusement> (Vol. 36, 364-365) that, "Though I am in some admirer of Mr. Hume's character and of his writings, yet I am sorry to see that little biographical account of himself imposed the public." The author sees the work as having "an obvious, perhaps, an undesigned tendency" to subvert a person's "future and eternal welfare." The author concludes that the Life is "a dry, unsatisfactory narrative; as little answering its title as expectation of the public." Hume's <Life> was published again in, 1778, and in several 19th century editions of his collected. The following is from the first 1777 edition.

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MY OWN LIFE

IT IS difficult for a man to speak long of himself without; therefore, I shall be short. It may be thought an instance of vanity that I pretend at all to write my life; but this narrative contains little more than the History of my Writings; as, almost all my life has been spent in Literary pursuits and. The first success of most of my writings was not such to be an object of vanity.

I was born the 26th of April 1711, old style, at Edinburgh. I of a good family, both by father and mother: my father's family a branch of the Earl of Home's, or Hume's; and my ancestors had proprietors of the estate, which my brother possesses, for generations. My mother was daughter of Sir David Falconer, of the College of Justice: the title of Lord Halkerton by succession to her brother.

My family, however, was not rich, and being myself a younger, my patrimony, according to the mode of my country, was of very slender. My father, who passed for a man of parts, died I was an infant, leaving me, with an elder brother and a, under the care of our mother, a woman of singular merit, though young and handsome, devoted herself entirely to the educating of her children. I passed through the ordinary of education with success, and was seized very early with a for literature, which has been the ruling passion of my, and the great source of my enjoyments. My studious, my sobriety, and my industry, gave my family a notion the law was a proper profession for me; but I found an aversion to everything but the pursuits of philosophy general learning; and while they fancied I was poring upon Voet Vinnius, Cicero and Virgil were the authors which I was secretly.

My very slender fortune, however, being unsuitable to this plan of life, and my health being a little broken by my ardent, I was tempted, or rather forced, to make a very feeble for entering into a more active scene of life. In 1734, I went to Bristol, with some recommendations to eminent merchants, but in a month found that scene totally unsuitable to me. I went over to, with a view of prosecuting my studies in a country retreat; I there laid that plan of life, which I have steadily and pursued. I resolved to make a very rigid

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frugality my deficiency of fortune, to maintain unimpaired my, and to regard every object as contemptible, except the of my talents in literature.

During my retreat in France, first at Reims, but chiefly at La, in Anjou, I composed my <Treatise of Human Nature>. After three years very agreeably in that country, I came over to in 1737. In the end of 1738, I published my Treatise, and went down to my mother and my brother, who lived at his house, and was employing himself very judiciously and in the improvement of his fortune.

Never literary attempt was more unfortunate than my Treatise of Nature. It fell <dead-born from the press>, without reaching distinction, as even to excite a murmur among the zealots. But naturally of a cheerful and sanguine temper, I very soon the blow, and prosecuted with great ardor my studies in country. In 1742, I printed at Edinburgh the first part of my the world was favourably received, and soon made me entirely my former disappointment. I continued with my mother and in the country, and in that time recovered the knowledge of Greek language, which I had too much neglected in my early.

In 1745, I received a letter from the Marquis of Annandale, me to come and live with him in England; I found also, that friends and family of that young noble man were desirous of him under my care and direction, for the state of his mind health required it. I lived with him a twelve month. My during that time made a considerable accession to my fortune. I then received an invitation from General St. Clair attend him as a secretary to his expedition, which was at first against Canada, but ended in an incursion on the coast of. Next year, to wit, 1747, I received an invitation from the to attend him in the same station in his military embassy to courts of Vienna and Turin. I then wore the uniform of an, and was introduced at these courts as aid-de-camp to the, along with Sir Harry Erskine and Captain Grant, now General. These two years were almost the only interruptions which my have received during the course of my life: I passed them, and in good company; and my appointments, with my, had made me reach a fortune, which I called independent, most of my friends were inclined to smile when I said so; in, I was now master of near a thousand pounds.

I had always entertained a notion, that my want of success in the Treatise of Human Nature, had proceeded more from the than the matter, and that I had been guilty of a very usual, in going to the press too early. I, therefore, cast first part of that work anew in The Enquiry concerning Human, which was published while I was at Turin. But this was at first little more successful than the Treatise of Human. On my return from Italy, I had the mortification to find all in a ferment, on account of Dr. Middleton's Free Enquiry, my performance was entirely overlooked and neglected. A new, which had been published at London of my Essays, moral and, met not with a much better reception.

Such is the force of natural temper, that these disappointments little or no impression on me. I went down in 1749, and lived years with my brother at his country house, for my mother was dead. I there composed the second part of my Essays, which I Political Discourses, and also my Enquiry concerning the of Morals, which is another part of my treatise that I anew. Meanwhile, my bookseller, A. Millar, informed me, that my publications (all but the unfortunate Treatise) were to be the subject of conversation; that the sale of them gradually increasing, and that new editions were demanded by

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Reverends, and Right Reverends, came out two or three in year; and I found, by Dr. Warburton's railing, that the books were to be esteemed in good company. However, I had fixed a, which I inflexibly maintained, never to reply to any; and not being very irascible in my temper, I have easily kept clear of all literary squabbles. These symptoms of a rising gave me encouragement, as I was ever more disposed to see favourable than unfavourable side of things; a turn of mind it is more happy to possess, than to be born to an estate of thousand a year.

In 1751, I removed from the country to the town, the true scene of a man of letters. In 1752, were published at Edinburgh, where I lived, my Political Discourses, the only work of mine that was on the first publication. It was well received abroad and home. In the same year was published at London, my Enquiry into the Principles of Morals; which, in my own opinion (who not to judge on that subject), is of all my writings, philosophical, or literary, incomparably the best. It unnoticed and unobserved into the world.

In 1752, the Faculty of Advocates chose me their Librarian, and from which I received little or no emolument, but which gave me the command of a large library. I then formed the plan of writing History of England; but being frightened with the notion of a narrative through a period of 1700 years, I commenced the accession of the House of Stuart, an epoch when, I thought, misrepresentations of faction began chiefly to take place. I, I own, sanguine in my expectations of the success of this work, thought that I was the only historian, that had at once neglected power, interest, and authority, and the cry of popular; and as the subject was suited to every capacity, I proportional applause. But miserable was my disappointment: was assailed by one cry of reproach, disapprobation, and even; English, Scotch, and Irish, Whig and Tory, churchman, sectary, freethinker and religionist, patriot and courtier, in their rage against the man, who had presumed to shed a tear for the fate of Charles I. and the Earl of Strafford; after the first ebullitions of their fury were over, what was more mortifying, the book seemed to sink into oblivion. Mr. told me, that in a twelve-month he sold only forty-five of it. I scarcely, indeed, heard of one man in the three, considerable for rank or letters, that could endure the. I must only except the primate of England, Dr. Herring, and primate of Ireland, Dr. Stone, which seem two odd exceptions. dignified prelates separately sent me messages not to be.

I was, however, I confess, discouraged; and had not the war at that time breaking out between France and England, I had retired to some provincial town of the former kingdom, changed my name, and never more have returned to my native. But as this scheme was not now practicable, and the volume was considerably advanced, I resolved to pick up and to persevere.

In this interval, I published at London my Natural History of, along with some other small pieces: its public entry was obscure, except only that Dr. Hurd wrote a pamphlet against, with all the illiberal petulance, arrogance, and scurrility, distinguish the Warburtonian school. This pamphlet gave me consolation for the otherwise indifferent reception of my.

In 1756, two years after the fall of the first volume, was the second volume of my History, containing the period the death of Charles I. till the Revolution. This

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performanceto give less displeasure to the Whigs, and was better. It not only rose itself, but helped to buoy up itsbrother.

But though I had been taught by experience, that the Whig partyin possession of bestowing all places, both in the state and in, I was so little inclined to yield to their senseless, that in above a hundred alterations, which farther study,, or reflection engaged me to make in the reigns of the twoStuarts, I have made all them invariably to the Tory side. Itridiculous to consider the English constitution before thatas a regular plan of liberty.

In 1759, I published my History of the House of Tudor. Theagainst this performance was almost equal to that againstHistory of the two first Stuarts. The reign of Elizabeth wasobnoxious. But I was now callous against theof public folly, and continued very peaceably andin my retreat at Edinburgh, to finish, in two volumes,more early part of the English History, which I gave to thein 1761, with tolerable, and but tolerable success.

But, notwithstanding this variety of winds and seasons, tomy writings had been exposed, they had still been making such, that the copy-money given me by the booksellers, muchanything formerly known in England; I was become not only, but opulent. I retired to my native country of, determined never more to set my foot out of it; andthe satisfaction of never having preferred a request togreat man, or even making advances of friendship to any of them.I was now turned of fifty, I thought of passing all the rest oflife in this philosophical manner, when I received, in 1763, anfrom the Earl of Hertford, with whom I was not in theacquainted, to attend him on his embassy to Paris, with a nearof being appointed secretary to the embassy; and, in the, of performing the functions of that office. This offer,inviting, I at first declined, both because I was reluctantbegin connexions with the great, and because I was afraid thatcivilities and gay company of Paris would prove disagreeable toperson of my age and humour: but on his lordship's repeating the, I accepted of it. I have every reason, both of pleasureinterest, to think myself happy in my connexion with that, as well as afterwards with his brother, General Conway.

Those who have not seen the strange effects of modes, willimagine the reception I met with at Paris, from men and womenall ranks and stations. The more I resiled from their excessive, the more I was loaded with them. There is, however, asatisfaction in living at Paris, from the great number of, knowing, and polite company with which that city aboundsall places in the universe. I thought once of settling therelife.

I was appointed secretary to the embassy; and in summer 1765,Hertford left me, being appointed Lord Lieutenant of Ireland. I<charge d' affaires> till the arrival of the Duke of Richmond,the end of the year. In the beginning of 1766, I left Paris,next summer went to Edinburgh, with the same view as formerly,burying myself in a philosophical retreat. I returned to that, not richer, but with much more money, and a much larger, by means of Lord Hertford's friendship, than I left it; andwas desirous of trying what superfluity could produce, as I hadmade an experiment of a competency. But, in 1767, Ifrom Mr. Conway an invitation to be Under-secretary; andinvitation, both the character of the person, and my connexionsLord Hertford, prevented me from declining. I returned toin 1768, very opulent (for I possessed a revenue of 1000L.year), healthy, and though

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somewhat stricken in years, with theof enjoying long my ease, and of seeing the increase of my.

In spring 1775, I was struck with a disorder in my bowels,at first gave me no alarm, but has since, as I apprehend it,mortal and incurable. I now reckon upon a speedy dissolution.have suffered very little pain from my disorder; and what is more, have, notwithstanding the great decline of my person, nevera moment's abatement of my spirits; insomuch, that were Iname the period of my life, which I should most choose to passagain, I might be tempted to point to this later period. Ithe same ardour as ever in study, and the same gaiety in. I consider, besides, that a man of sixty-five, by dying,off only a few years of infirmities; and though I see manyof my literary reputation's breaking out at last withlustre, I knew that I could have but few years to enjoy. It is difficult to be more detached from life than I am at.

To conclude historically with my own character. I am, or rather(for that is the style I must now use in speaking of myself,emboldens me the more to speak my sentiments); I was, I say, aof mild dispositions, of command of temper, of an open, social,cheerful humour, capable of attachment, but little susceptibleenmity, and of great moderation in all my passions. Even my loveliterary fame, my ruling passion, never soured my temper,my frequent disappointments. My company was notto the young and careless, as well as to the studiousliterary; and as I took a particular pleasure in the company ofwomen, I had no reason to be displeased with the reception Iwith from them. In a word, though most men any wise eminent,found reason to complain of calumny, I never was touched, orattacked by her baleful tooth: and though I wantonly exposedto the rage of both civil and religious factions, they seemedbe disarmed in my behalf of their wonted fury. My friends neveroccasion to vindicate any one circumstance of my character and: not but that the zealots, we may well suppose, would haveglad to invent and propagate any story to my disadvantage, butcould never find any which they thought would wear the face of. I cannot say there is no vanity in making this funeralof myself, but I hope it is not a misplaced one; and this ismatter of fact which is easily cleared and ascertained.18, 1776.